

Chapter I

THE TEACHER'S NEED OF PSYCHOLOGY

'Teachers have not yet discovered their true function in the community. They insist, in accordance with a bad tradition, on regarding themselves simply as teachers of this or that subject—English or Mathematics or Latin [or Music] as the case may be. For this a totally different idea has to be substituted and firmly grasped; and that idea is that they are not, primarily, teachers of subjects at all, but teachers of minds by means of subjects. When they fully realize that, they will at once see that they are bound to study Mind.'—*S. S. Laurie.*

'How widely must teaching as it is differ from teaching as it should be, when hardly any parents, and but few teachers, know anything about psychology.'—*Herbert Spencer.*

THE attempt to teach anybody anything is made on the assumption that the pupil has a mind; so it is curious that teachers should, as they generally do, leave Mind out of their calculations altogether. They stake their chances of success on knowledge of their subject. Now, knowledge of one's subject is, of course, the first essential—we cannot teach what we do not know—but it is by no means the whole of a teacher's equipment. The teacher must know how her pupil's mind is likely to behave with regard to that subject. For the mind has its *ways* of taking in different kinds of knowledge, and dealing with it and combining it and reproducing it; and, like the body, it has an appetite for different kinds of food at different stages, and deals with different kinds of food in different ways. It stands to reason that if we know

PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO MUSIC TEACHING

something of these ways in which the mind learns, and what kind of work, and how much, we may expect from it as our pupils pass from childhood to boy-and-girlhood, we shall have a better chance of choosing aright the knowledge suited to each stage of their development, the food that they can then digest.

2. In spite of the vast improvement in methods of teaching all subjects, we still find that much of the knowledge presented to little children is adult knowledge chopped up small; and that skill is demanded from baby fingers of a kind for which brain and muscle are not as yet properly co-ordinated.

3. Parents are sometimes very anxious and very insistent that their children should begin pianoforte lessons at about five years old, when very few children are ready either mentally or physically. Parents forget, or have never realized, that pianoforte-playing is only a part of the child's musical education; and they are probably neglecting altogether the part that belongs to those early years, and to which it is their own special province to attend—I mean the musical education of the home and nursery. If parents realized that the success of the future music *lessons* depends largely on the amount of nursery music that is stored up in the child's memory, they would, if only from motives of economy, do their part in the preparation, and do it *at the proper time*. For, in music, as in everything else, each stage in the child's development demands its own kind of instruction, and these are not interchangeable.

THE TEACHER'S NEED OF PSYCHOLOGY

You cannot demand from the child of five the kind of work that the child of ten does with interest, understanding, and enjoyment. But neither must you expect from the child of ten either interest or enjoyment in work that he should have been doing when he was five. Each age and stage brings with it the opportunity for certain kinds of activity, and when the stage has passed, the opportunity has passed also. Nature is remorseless and marches on, and what we did not do when we should we cannot do when we would. Early childhood is the time for fostering that *love* of music which I believe is planted by nature in every child's heart; which, combined with the right sort of teaching later on, buds out into the power of appreciation, and without which we never do really appreciate music, however technical our knowledge of it may be.

4. On the other hand we find some of the carefully elaborated methods for young children laying out a course of musical *theory*, to be carried on for a couple of years without any piano-playing at all. This is the other extreme. In some of these schemes the teaching of adult knowledge is very rampant. In one course for little ones from five years old to seven we find exercises (worked in notation) on (1) modified intervals and their inversions; (2) all the key signatures, major and minor; (3) modulation; (4) analysis of chords, including dominant and diminished sevenths; (5) information about the range of orchestral instruments; and one course, sent me from America, included musical biography, with a set of cabinet

PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO MUSIC TEACHING

photographs of the great composers. Fortunately, mind as well as body rejects unsuitable food, and the processes are much alike. The mind simply throws off information for which it has no use; and the teacher who took such pains in administering it wonders what has become of it.

5. Now these educational mistakes are made by anxious loving mothers and equally anxious enthusiastic teachers, honestly wishful to do the best thing for the children. Why? Because 'hardly any parents and but few teachers know anything about psychology'; and because teachers are thinking about their subject and its development, and do not understand that it is the pupil's point of view that counts, that it is by *his* mental activity that the work must be done. We cannot learn for our pupil any more than we can eat for him. All that the best teacher can do is to arouse in the pupil's mind an activity by which he, the pupil, takes in and assimilates the material of knowledge that is presented to him. ~~If that activity is not aroused there is no teaching, because there is no learning.~~ Now the probable reaction of a pupil's mind upon a given idea can only be calculated on if we know something of the laws of mental life; and these laws of mental life are the subject matter of psychology.

6. You may feel inclined to ask here: 'Are all teachers who are ignorant of psychology necessarily bad teachers?' Not at all. Every good teacher is an unconscious psychologist, for every really good teacher of children is so in virtue of his power of seeing things from the child's point

THE TEACHER'S NEED OF PSYCHOLOGY

of view. As Professor Laurie puts it: 'Sound practice is sound theory unconscious of itself; sound theory is sound practice conscious of itself.' So that 'there is a latent psychology in all good teaching.' But this unconscious, sympathetic insight is a rare gift. Those who have it we call 'born teachers.' Unfortunately they are not born in proportion to the juvenile population, and—they are not born *teaching*. They are 'born' only in the sense of the born doctor or the born engineer; and we do not entrust the building of a bridge to an engineer or the life of a child to a doctor on the strength of the endowments with which he was born.

7. Again, you may ask: 'Will psychology make teaching easy for us, banish all our schoolroom worries, tell us what to do from day to day?' By no means. One of the things that psychology *reveals* to us is that teaching is not an easy thing. In the very first of Professor James' delightful 'Talks to Teachers' he tells them that 'to know psychology is absolutely no guarantee that we shall be good teachers.' At the back of her psychology the teacher needs that sympathy of which I spoke, and tact, and patience, and mother-wit, and presence of mind in dealing with the unexpected; and these psychology cannot supply. They are part of the teacher's native fitness for her work—the 'born' part of it.

8. Again, psychology cannot give us definite directions about our daily work, or provide each teacher with 'methods for immediate schoolroom use.' For this, as Professor James says, 'an inter-

PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO MUSIC TEACHING

mediary inventive mind must make the application by using its originality.'

9. Now, having said what psychology cannot do for us, we must inquire what it can do. Let me quote Professor James again: (a) '*We know in advance, if we are psychologists, that certain methods will be wrong, so our psychology saves us from mistakes.*' Not only that; it saves our pupils from the results of our mistakes, which is still more important. In the words of another American educationist, 'It is an important function of the science of pedagogy to protect children from the experimenter in devices and fads,' and our psychology certainly 'narrows the path for experiments' if we know in advance that certain methods must be wrong.

10. (b) '*It makes us more clear as to what we are about.*' If so, it saves both time and worry. A person who sees her way clearly goes about her work calmly. A teacher should be able to state clearly not only why she teaches a certain subject, but why she teaches it in a certain way and marshals its facts in a certain order. In preparing a lesson she should see clearly its relation to past lessons and to future ones.

11. (c) '*We gain confidence in any method we may be using as soon as we believe that it has theory as well as practice at its back.*' Notice that Professor James takes methods for granted. Notice, too, that he makes psychology the touchstone of method. He says, practically, 'If a method squares with psychology it is a good method; if it does not square with it, it is not good.' This sounds

THE TEACHER'S NEED OF PSYCHOLOGY

simple enough, but you must have the touchstone. Every text-book in schoolroom use is a method, a *way* of teaching arithmetic, or history, or the grammar of a language, or any other subject. Of these many will be excellent, many may be futile. How shall we judge of their merits? They must agree with psychology as applied to the particular subject, and several different *ways* may so agree, but you must have the touchstone. There are, to-day, almost as many methods of teaching music to children as there are theories of voice-production for adults. If, among these, you can find half a dozen that square with your psychology equally well, they are all equally good, and you are pretty safe in adopting any one of the half-dozen; for there is no 'one and only way' of teaching anything, and a method is only a means to an end. But you must have the touchstone or you have no means of forming a judgment. Herbart says 'we must have it (psychology) before we can say of a single lesson what has been taught wrongly and what rightly.' We could not, at all events, give a reason for our judgment.

12. Then there are things that every teacher wants to know. How to be interesting. How to capture the pupil's attention, and how long we may expect to keep it. How to introduce ideas into his mind in such a way that they shall not at once slip out again. How to direct his observing powers—very important in music teaching. How to train his memory with regard to one's special subject. How to test whether his knowledge is real or not—for what people call 'results' are most

elusive and deceptive. All these things—attention, interest, observing and remembering and forgetting—are only *ways* in which the mind behaves, and psychology is only the study of the mind's behaviour.

13. Now the mind's behaviour is a thing that we can observe, so that psychology is studied, like any other natural science, by observation. But the student of psychology has one great advantage over the people who study other sciences. The student of chemistry, physics, or mechanics needs a laboratory. The student of botany or geology must work in the fields and hedgerows, on the hills and among the rocks. But the student of psychology carries his laboratory about with him; for there is only one mind that he can observe *directly*, and that is his own. So he can do a large part of his work anywhere and at any time; in the light of day or in the dark.

14. This looking inwards, or introspection, is a thing you are constantly doing without being conscious of it. Every time you say to any one 'I think,' or 'I feel,' or 'I wonder,' or 'I am trying to recall,' etc., you are telling of a process that is going on in your mind. When you say 'I have an idea!' you are not laying claim to a *thing*, but describing a *happening*. All that the psychologist asks is that you should do this consciously and with a purpose.

15. Introspection, however, is not sufficient for the teacher, because the mind she is examining is an adult mind; and if she tries to apply this adult psychology to the teaching of children she may

THE TEACHER'S NEED OF PSYCHOLOGY

make serious mistakes; she may demand from a child that which at that stage of his development he is not capable of doing, and call him naughty or stupid because he does not do it. Or, on the other hand, she may succeed by skilful teaching in making the child do things which at that stage of his development he ought not to be able to do, and for this nature usually takes her revenge later on.

'The decisive fact is not what children *can* do under skilful stimulation, but *what they ought to do*. . . . The highest interest and enthusiasm may be awakened by exercises that violate the most fundamental principles of child-training.'—*Emerson White*.

16. So, alongside general or adult psychology, and as a corrective to it, the teacher must learn as much as possible about the child-mind and its behaviour and its gradual development, because it is the child-mind that she is attempting to educate; and here her study has to be indirect. She must do it by observation of the words, looks, and actions of all the children with whom she comes into contact. And, as the student of other sciences compares his observations and experiments with his textbook, so the teacher will compare her personal observation with the statements that she finds in books. Observation, in short, must be under guidance, at least in its early stages.

17. Much, too, she may learn by trying to remember her own knowings and feelings and doings when she was herself a child; for though here she may call up a picture either blurred by distance or based too much on accounts of her childhood given her by too partial relatives, the

attempt will give her a sympathy with children that hardly anything else can give.

18. The nearest approach to the born teacher is she whose memory of her own childish thoughts and ways is so fresh and keen that she never has to make an effort to come down to the child's level; she instinctively sees things from the point of view of her youngest pupil. Accustomed to realize the attitude of the learner, she is herself, as a rule, eminently teachable, and glad to seize upon every principle, every device, that may make her way clearer. Her very teachableness is a danger, for if she does not possess the touchstone of which we have spoken she has no guide in her choice of teaching devices; but her *attitude* is right. A teacher of much insight and experience said to me: 'I divide teachers into two classes, improvable and un-improvable. The best that I can say of myself is that I hope I am an improvable.'

19. Educators who have high ideals about the teacher's function have said some very severe things about those who, thinking themselves born teachers, are 'content to practise an art the principles of which they do not understand, and haughtily resent any attempt to enlighten them.' —(*Adams*.) With some grave words from Professor Laurie I will conclude. He says:

'It is, when you think of it, a very daring thing to profess to educate a human being. . . . You are engaged in helping to form the finest, most complex, most subtle thing known to man, viz. a mind; and do you propose to go on from day to day as your fancy prompts, tinkering here and tinkering there, and seeing what comes of it? Surely not.'